

Message Text

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S E C R E T MADRID 3645

EXDIS

DEPT PASS SECRETARY'S PARTY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OVIP (FORD, GERALD), SP

SUBJ: PRESIDENT'S VISIT--A FEW NOTES ON FRANCO

1. WHILE I REALIZE THAT A BIOGRAPHY OF FRANCO HAS BEEN PREPARED FOR THE PRESIDENT'S BRIEFING BOOK, I THOUGHT I MIGHT SET DOWN A FEW OF MY OWN THOUGHTS WITH REGARD TO FRANCO'S PRESENT SITUATION, PHYSICAL AND MENTAL, AS A POSSIBLE HELP IN TERMS OF THE PRESIDENT'S CONVERSATION WITH HIM.

2. FRANCO IS NOW HALF WAY INTO HIS 83RD YEAR. HE SUFFERS FROM PARKINSON'S AND HAS A MORE OR LESS CONSTANT TREMOR, PARTICULARLY IN HIS RIGHT HAND, BUT ALSO VISIBLE IN HIS LEFT. HIS EYELIDS FLUTTER MORE OR LESS CONSTANTLY AND HIS LIPS ARE APT TO QUIVER. HE HAS SOME DIFFICULTY OF SPEECH AND SPEAKS IN A RATHER FAINT, HIGH-PITCHED VOICE WHICH, HOWEVER, IS ENTIRELY AUDIBLE TO THOSE SITTING CLOSE TO HIM. HE WALKS SLOWLY, BUT FAIRLY STEADILY. HE HAS DIFFICULTY GETTING IN AND OUT OF HIS CAR.

3. LAST SUMMER, FRANCO WAS A VERY ILL MAN SUFFERING A SERIOUS PHLEBITIS ATTACK, COMPLICATED BY ANTI-COAGULENT TREATMENTS. THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE CONCERN AS TO WHETHER HE WOULD SURVIVE. HIS RECOVERY HAS BEEN REMARK-

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ABLE AND IN SPITE OF RECURRING, BUT UNCONFIRMABLE, RE-

PORTS THAT HE IS SUFFERING FROM A VARIETY OF TERMINAL DISEASES, HE NEVERTHELESS MANAGES TO MAINTAIN A VERY ACTIVE SCHEDULE, PARTICULARLY FOR A MAN OF HIS AGE. FOR EXAMPLE, LAST SUNDAY, HE WENT THROUGH THE ENTIRE VICTORY PARADE WHICH REQUIRED STANDING UP FOR OVER AN HOUR AND A HALF; ON TUESDAY, HE HAD HIS REGULAR MILITARY AUDIENCES, AND THEN LATER IN THE DAY PRESIDED OVER THE OPENING OF THE AGRICULTURAL FAIR. ON WEDNESDAY, HE HAD THE REGULAR CIVIL AUDIENCES, AND ON FRIDAY, THERE WILL BE A COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OVER WHICH HE PRESIDES. IN BETWEEN THESE FORMAL COMMITMENTS, HE MEETS REGULARLY WITH THE INDIVIDUAL MINISTERS AND WITH PRESIDENT ARIAS. THUS, THROUGH SHEER WILL POWER CONDITIONED BY A LIFE WHICH HAS BEEN DEDICATED TO THESE ACTIVITIES FOR ALMOST 40 YEARS, FRANCO STILL MANAGES TO SHOULDER A FAIRLY HEAVY CEREMONIAL AND ALSO SUBSTANTIVE LOAD.

4. AT THE SAME TIME, HE DEFINITELY HAS BAD DAYS AND DAYS WHEN HE HAS DIFFICULTY GETTING STARTED AND IS LACKING IN LUCIDITY. I AM TOLD THAT WHEN FOREIGN MINISTER GENSCHER WENT TO SEE HIM LAST MONTH, IT FIRST APPEARED THAT LITTLE OR NO CONVERSATION COULD TAKE PLACE AS FRANCO SEEMED TO BE UNABLE TO GET HIMSELF GOING. HOWEVER, HE THEN BEGAN TO ASK QUESTIONS OF GENSCHER AND THE CONVERSATION BECAME MOSTLY ONE OF SHORT QUESTIONS BY FRANCO AND REPLIES BY GENSCHER.

5. FRANCO, A GALICIAN, HAS BEEN RENOWNED FOR HIS TACITURNITY AND HIS CAUTIOUSNESS OF SPEECH. IN ALL PROBABILITY, HIS STATEMENTS AND QUESTIONS TO THE PRESIDENT WILL BE OF A RATHER GENERAL NATURE AND VERY SHORT AND HIS REPLIES TO THE PRESIDENT BRIEF AND RATHER SLOW IN COMING. IT IS MORE LIKELY THAT HE WILL LOOK TO THE PRESIDENT TO CARRY THE MAJOR SHARE OF THE CONVERSATION. I THINK IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT FRANCO WILL TURN TO EITHER ARIAS OR CORTINA TO EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS.
STABLER

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED SECRETARY'S PARTY.

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